

PETALUMA HISTORICAL MUSEUM  
Oral History Program

## FIVE ACRES ON SKILLMAN LANE

Gretchen Stonitsch Lichau Nov 1988

My father, Mathias Stonitsch, was born in Austria, and came to America in 1903 at the age of 20. He settled in San Jose with his sister.

My mother, Ada Josina Andresen was born on the Isle of Fohr, Germany. She came to America in her teens to be with her sister in Sebastopol, to take care of her sister's children, as her sister had to work on the ranch. After a year or two my mother went to work in Petaluma as a housekeeper. When the family she worked for moved to San Jose, she decided to go with them.

My mother joined the San Jose Hermanson's Lodge, where she met my father. They were married in June in 1914. The story of their meeting is that my Dad was bartending at the Lodge, spilled something on my mother's dress, perhaps by intent, and in asking her pardon also asked if he could escort her to her home that night. She told her girl friend that she would go home on the electric car, if that arrived first. But it didn't, and so the courtship started.

At that time my father worked for a lumber company which later suffered a fire. He got work in San Francisco, commuting every day. My mother then asked my father if they could move to Petaluma so she could be near her four sisters. It was about the same commuting time to Petaluma as San Jose, so they moved to Petaluma about 1922.

In Petaluma they bought the five acre ranch on Skillman Lane where we grew up. My father would leave Sunday night and come home Friday night. I would meet him at the top of the hill on Skillman. He always brought me a candy bar.

Later my father found a job at Camm and Hedges Lumber, making doors and window frames.

They did a little chicken raising at first, and then increased their flock. I remember feeding the chicks, helping to cull, and moving the baby chicks from the brooder house into the chicken houses when they became pullets. We carried them by hand, at night, six at a time. Later we used coops to move them. I remember picking kale for them.

After the 30's my mother went to work to help support the family; first in the laundry at the Petaluma Hotel, then at Poultry Producers, candling eggs.

At sometime my father went into the sack business. I remember I sewed the holes in the sacks, and got 1 cent for every one I did.

I started Sunday school at a very young age, attending Grace Evangelical on Keller Street. And it was here that later I was married to Art.

{ Gretchen's brother and sister are Gottfried Mathias Stonitsch, and Gertrude Sophie Philipp, both of Petaluma. Gretchen and her husband Art Lichau live in San Jose}.

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In addition to the rights and authority given to you under the preceeding paragraph, I hereby authorize you to edit, publish, sell and/or license the use of my oral history memoir in any other manner which the Museum considers to be desirable and I waive any claim to any payments which may be received as a consequence thereof by the Museum.

PLACE 2163 Sufoinet Hlr  
San Jose, Ca. 95124

DATE March 25, 1994

Gretchen Lichau  
(Interviewee)

Maxine Durney  
(for the Petaluma Historical Museum)

PETALUMA HISTORICAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM  
 Oral History Program  
 Family History Questionnaire

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Birthdate</u>	<u>Birthplace</u>	<u>Deceased? Date</u>
<u>Parents*</u>	Mathias Stonitsch	5/31/1883	Austria	4/26/63
	Ada Josefa Andresen	4/10/18	Isle of Föhr, Germany	3/4/87

Brothers & Sisters

Gottfried Mathias Stonitsch

Gertrude Sophie Philipps

Grand-parents\*

Matthias Stonitsch

Maria Kump

Löge Andresen

Sophie Alvine Katrina Friedden

Spouse

Arthur Ray Lichau

Children

Judith Ann Schultz

Gary Ray Lichau

Randee Jo Sparrer

Grandchildren

Matt Alan Schultz

Eric Henry Schultz

James Michael Lichau

Wendy Michelle Lichau

Michael Andrew Sparrer

Kevin Richard Sparrer

\*Please include maiden name of mother and grandmothers.

THANK YOU!

PETALUMA HISTORICAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM  
Oral History Program  
Narrator Personal Information Questionnaire

Name Lichau Gretchen Marie Stonitsch  
Last First Middle (Maiden)

Address 2163 Sufoniet blr.  
San Jose, Ca. 95124

Marital status: Married ☒ Single ☐ Divorced ☐ Widowed ☐

Birthdate 1/25/20 Birthplace San Jose

Length of residence in Petaluma (or Sonoma County) 37 years

Education: Elementary school Cinnabar School

Secondary school Petaluma High School Grad 1938

College none Grad ☐

Other ☐

Occupation(s) or former occupations(s) employed at Western  
Condensing Creamery, Fashion Lane dress shop, in Petaluma  
Vann's Crafts & Hobbies as manager in San Jose

Travels Hawaii, Europe, Alaska

Organizations, clubs Member of Grace Evangelical Church in Petaluma  
which united with the Congregational Church in 1957  
member of San Jose 1st Congregational Church (United Church of Christ)  
Other special interests Member of the Women's International Bowling Congress,  
Golf, Card playing, gardening, knitting

Additional comments My one dream in life was to be  
able to play the organ. So at the age of 70  
I accomplished this dream.

THANK YOU!